

## Elbow Injury Advice

You have been diagnosed with an elbow injury. Even though there is no break in a bone on your X-ray, you still could have injured the soft tissues like muscles, tendons or ligaments around your elbow.

Ligaments (which are strong tissues around joints attaching bones together and giving support to the joints) can be injured, usually by being stretched during a sudden pull, and this causes inflammation, swelling, and bleeding (bruising) around the affected joint.

During the first few days your elbow may be swollen and painful so a sling may have been provided to rest your elbow in a comfortable position for a few days.

In order to help the natural healing process, please follow the advice below.

Things you should do	Things you shouldn't do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest your elbow for the first 24/48 hours after your injury but avoid long spells of not moving at all – you should move it gently for 10 to 20 seconds every hour when you are awake.</li> <li>• If you have been given a sling, keep your elbow in it when moving around. When sitting you can rest your elbow in a comfortable position, such as on a cushion.</li> <li>• If your elbow is swollen use ice packs over your sling (frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do), for 15-20 minutes every 2 hours if you can.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use ice packs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li> <li>○ if you have poor sensation to cold</li> <li>○ if you know you have poor circulation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Place ice packs directly onto your skin as they can burn.</li> <li>• Don't leave an icepack on while you are asleep</li> <li>• Don't use ice for more than 20 minutes at a time - you won't be helping heal your injury any faster, and you can cause damage to the tissue</li> <li>• Don't try to force your elbow to be straight - is likely to cause pain and delay your recovery.</li> <li>• Don't carry heavy objects, or strain the elbow initially for the first few weeks</li> <li>• Play contact or racquet sports until your elbow is free of pain and feels strong.</li> </ul>

## Exercises

**Begin these flexibility exercises as soon as you can** - provided they don't cause excessive pain – as they are designed to mobilise the joint, strengthen your muscles and so help you back to full function, flexibility and strength of your elbow. The repetitions and sets are a guideline, add an extra 1 or 2 repetitions every few days as long as you feel comfortable.

Remove your sling and exercise your shoulder, elbow, and wrist at least 4 times a day. It is important to keep gently moving the elbow as this will prevent stiffness and ensure the quickest return to normal use.

After 48 hours, try to use your arm more - exercise really helps your elbow and can relieve pain. Do whatever you normally would and stay at or return to work - this is important and is the best way to get better. You may need to adapt how you do things initially.

As your pain settles you may want to remove the sling completely – this can be done as soon as you feel able – and as your arm starts to feel more comfortable, gradually build up to heavier activities. Your injury may take up to 6 weeks to settle. Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less discomfort and good movement

## How to tell if you're exercising at the right level

When doing exercise you should listen to your pain levels, especially in the early stages. You may find that these exercises increase your symptoms slightly in the beginning. However, they should get easier over time. It can be helpful to rate your pain out of 10 (0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had), for example:

**Green** 1 to 3 - mild pain

**Amber** 4 to 6 – moderate pain

**Red** 7 to 10 - severe pain

Aim to keep your pain within a rating of 0 to 5. If your pain gets above this level, you can change the exercises by:

- reducing the number of times, you do a movement
- reducing the speed of a movement
- increasing rest time between movements

## Exercise 1

Sit with the back of your hand resting on a table.

Gradually lift your hand so that your thumb points to the ceiling then turn your hand to face down on the table.

Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds and slowly release.

Slowly return your hand to the starting position

Do this 10 times repeating 3 - 4 times a day

Bending your wrist from left to right is one repetition.



## Exercise 2

Stand up. Bend your elbow up towards you as far as possible (Fig 1)  
Feel it stretching and hold this for 10 seconds.  
Now straighten it out as far as you are able, but do not force it.  
Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds.  
Do this 10 times repeating 3-4 times a day.

**Fig**



If you aren't able to do this because elbow is too stiff, grasp the wrist/hand of the affected arm and gently help to bend then straighten it with your other hand (fig 2)  
**2** Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds.  
Start by doing 10 repetitions of each exercise, 3 -4 times a day.



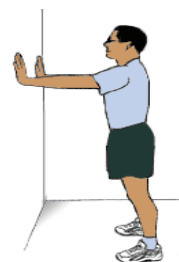
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**Fig 1**  
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## Exercise 3

Lean against a wall with your fingers turned upwards. Slowly try to straighten your elbow, pushing your hand into the wall. Hold for 30 seconds then release. Repeat 5 times 3-4 times a day



## When can I return to normal activities?

If you participate in an active hobby then it is advised that you do not return to this until you have full strength, full range of movement and you can use your elbow normally without experiencing pain or swelling.

For those returning to sport, swimming is good exercise, but practice specific activities like throwing a ball, to prepare the elbow. Build these activities up gradually before returning to full training sessions and competition.

## What should I take for pain?

No pain relief may be needed if the sprain is mild. However, painkillers, such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then.

They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol.

**With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** (like Ibuprofen) can relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them.

Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either.

You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

**If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP, or self-refer to your local physiotherapy department or return to the Emergency Department/MIU department where you were seen.**

Physio self-referral link: [abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-of-services/physiotherapy/bone-joint-muscle-physiotherapy-services-musculoskeletal](https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-of-services/physiotherapy/bone-joint-muscle-physiotherapy-services-musculoskeletal)

If you are unable to do this electronically you should call 01495 768715 between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

### References:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/exercises/exercises-for-elbow-problems/>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/sprains-strains/#!scenario>

**If you are at all concerned about your injury, please contact the relevant Emergency Department: Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287 Or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**  
**Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**  
**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353**  
**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**